

Book Review: Women Writers and their Websites: Presenting Traditional and New Media Reference Sources for Women Writers

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WOMEN WRITERS AND THEIR WEBSITES: PRESENTING TRADITIONAL AND NEW MEDIA REFERENCE SOURCES FOR WOMEN WRITERS

Katherine A. Dean, Miriam Conteh-Morgan and James K. Bracken
The Undergraduate's Companion to Women Writers and Their Web Sites
Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2002, 182 pp., ISBN 1-56308-935-1

This book will be a good resource for undergraduate students engaged in literary research focusing on women writers from the English-speaking world. The references used, including those stemming from traditional print media like bibliographies, biographies and criticism and new media like the websites on the Internet, complement the diversity of the women writers in this book. The current edition is the second of two books that have been published under the 'Companion' series. This latest edition extends the original target of American writers in the first edition to focus on women. The first book, *The Undergraduate's Companion to American Writers and Their Web Sites*, includes a more diverse, but specialized listing of writers. One commercial review of *The Undergraduate's Companion to Women Writers and Their Web Sites* pointed out that the authors concentrate on women writers from the medieval to the contemporary period. Students researching other periods may wish to take note of this.

The introduction provides a good overview to the organization of the book, which is divided into three main sections. The first section provides an alphabetical listing of the writers, including their names and dates of birth. The second section provides an overview of the websites on women writers that Dean and her colleagues consider most authoritative and informative. The third section contains the entries on the women writers and is split into three main areas: the websites, biographies, criticism and the bibliographies of the women writers. This section also includes references to journals, dictionaries, encyclopaedias or handbooks. The near 200 women writers included have been selected because their work features in the most widely used literature anthologies.

The authors take an interdisciplinary approach to presenting the women writers they include. They aim to highlight the diversity between the women writers, including, among other aspects, their ethnicities, religions and ages. They accomplish this by referring to secondary sources that give information about the writers' personal lives including their social and political activities.

As we would expect of academic reference material in a period that has been called 'the age of information' by the renowned sociologist Manuel Castells, the authors of this book have risen to the challenge of providing references and research material from what we may define as new media. They cover traditional print resources as well as new media resources like the Internet, CDs, DVDs and even digital film. In this way they show their commitment to providing as many relevant tools for literary research as possible. In my view, the authors succeed in providing a wealth of relevant references on the women writers they have chosen. In many cases, the material in the book refers to all the main publications available when the text was written and guides students to other relevant resources.

Given that the authors are committed to the use of diverse sources for research, including the biographies and bibliographies and the new media sources, I would like to make a few suggestions for the next edition (since such a reference work will date quickly). In my view, students would find useful and relevant a chronological index in addition to the alphabetical index. A subject list cross-referencing the different categories of work the women have published would also be helpful. In addition, a geographical reference to the women writers, e.g. in the form of a

simple map, might help the students to locate women writers in the region(s) from which they came and in which they lived. The map could focus on regional, religious or other factors that would be relevant for student research. For example, in the introduction the authors mention women writers from the US and Britain (whom they point out represent the majority of woman writers), Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Ireland. It would also be helpful if visual material was added for students whose preferred learning style is a visual one. The companion may increase its readership by making a name as a cross-over reference book that accommodates different learning styles.

There are numerous references to websites throughout the book. However, a random check on the websites showed that a small percentage of hyperlinks are already no longer accessible. Given that websites and hyperlinks do tend to change without notice and sometimes without redirections, the authors may want to provide some general tips for navigating from websites in which the links are not, or appear not to be, functional. By navigating back to the root and searching for the woman writer the student may locate her on another page. Such tips should decrease any frustration for those who may not be familiar with searching the Internet. To this end, the authors will do well to give a few tips for navigation. One way to accomplish this is for the panel to revisit the websites, note where redirects or navigation problems are, analyse the types of redirects and problems and write the results into the section 'Web Sites' in the introduction. This improvement should reduce the possibilities for confusion and help to make the next edition to the Companion series even more enjoyable and useful to student researchers.

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GETTING TO GRIPS WITH FEMINIST SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THEORY

Janice McLaughlin
Feminist Social and Political Theory
New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 214 pp., ISBN 0-3339-6810-7

The book *Feminist Social and Political Theory* by Janice McLaughlin is an undergraduate student's guide to current feminist debates in social and political theory. As such, it aims to be a practical, easy to follow guide that introduces current feminist debates on equal rights, standpoint theories, the ethics of care, post-modernism, Foucault, queer theory and social studies of technology. It offers clear summaries of central arguments in the field, feminist critiques of the arguments, feminist revisions of the theories and the associated political uses and benefits for the theories.

McLaughlin's discussion of standpoint theories begins with a clear summary of Marxist ideas of historical materialism. According to McLaughlin, Marx and Engels 'argue that human beings develop their sense of consciousness through their relationship with the real world, and the labour involved in producing the material necessities of life' (p. 48). Thus, one's experiences in life and their role in the material market determine their understanding of the universe. 'The problem is that in a capitalist society, the consciousness that is held to be "man's", is that of the ruling class' (p. 48). Where citizens once worked to develop their own craft, but now work in companies ruled by managers that dictate their actions and